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## Attitudes and behavioural intentions towards ethnic minorities: an empirical test of several theoretical explanations for the Dutch case

Geneviève Verberk, Peer Scheepers and Albert Felling

**Abstract** *In recent decades, attitudes towards ethnic minorities have become a significant topic for research. A great deal of debate among researchers has concentrated on the distinction between 'traditional' overt attitudes and 'contemporary' covert attitudes towards ethnic minorities. In this article it is argued that the distinction between overt and covert unfavourable attitudes is extremely important in revealing the nature, social location, determinants and consequences of contemporary unfavourable attitudes in Dutch society. This article shows among which categories of education and social class the different forms of unfavourable attitudes are strongly prevalent. It also shows how the differences in people's attitudes play a role in their intended behaviour towards ethnic minorities.*

KEYWORDS: ETHNIC MINORITIES; THE NETHERLANDS; ATTITUDES; BEHAVIOUR; SOCIAL CLASS; EDUCATION

### Introduction and research questions

American researchers have discovered a continuing decrease of overt unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities, as indicated by a decline in the percentage of members of the majority who reject the general principles of ethnic equality. However, this equality has not yet been achieved and opposition to the implementation of policies aimed at establishing equality has remained consistent over time (see Schuman *et al.* 1997). Several scholars have argued that this apparent contradiction might be due to new, more subtle forms of unfavourable attitudes (Meertens and Pettigrew 1997; Verberk 1999).

Unlike the United States, Dutch society has not seen a decline of overt unfavourable attitudes. They appear to be rather stable over time (Scheepers *et al.* 1994). Yet people's desire to maintain ethnic distance, their support for ethnic discrimination, and their opposition to affirmative action all vary considerably over time (Coenders and Scheepers 1998; Scheepers 1995, 1996; Scheepers and Coenders 1996; Scheepers *et al.* 1997). This means that the presence of overt unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities does not suffice as an explanation for these behavioural intentions.

Among others, Meertens and Pettigrew have already tried to uncover covert unfavourable attitudes of members of the Dutch majority towards ethnic minorities (Meertens and Pettigrew 1997; Pettigrew and Meertens 1995). Their work on overt and subtle prejudice has received a lot of scientific attention. However, secondary analyses (Coenders *et al.* 2001) have shown that a number of method-

ological flaws have led Meertens and Pettigrew to substantially invalid conclusions about the different dimensions, determinants and consequences of blatant and subtle prejudice. There has been a great deal of debate about the logic and necessity of this distinction (Sniderman and Tetlock 1986a, 1986b; van den Berg and Wouters 1998). To formulate our research questions, we will consider the conceptual and operational conditions necessary to distinguish these two forms of attitude towards ethnic minorities empirically (cf. Coenders *et al.* 2001).

First, a valid measure of covert unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities must be at least moderately correlated with a valid measure of overt unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities. After all, both overt and covert unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities refer to the same underlying antipathy. Second, even though the measures of overt and covert unfavourable attitudes should be at least moderately intercorrelated, they must be factorially distinguishable in analysis with no constraints on the factor structure in order to *test* instead of *confirm* the measures, a point emphasised by Coenders *et al.* (2001) and missed by Pettigrew and Meertens (2001: 300); otherwise distinguishing between them is unlikely to be instructive. Third, since overt and covert unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities are part of the same underlying antipathy, they must both be correlated with favourable attitudes towards the ethnic in-group since, as Social Identity theory suggests, people engage in processes of social identification and contra-identification simultaneously (Tajfel 1982a, 1982b; Tajfel and Turner 1979).<sup>1</sup> The outcome of these two processes is that people combine favourable attitudes towards the ethnic majority with unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities. This complex of attitudes is called *ethnocentrism* (see Eisinga and Scheepers 1989; Sumner 1959). Fourth, overt unfavourable attitudes on the one hand and covert unfavourable attitudes on the other hand must prevail among people who belong to different social categories. This does not mean that the different forms of attitude have entirely different determinants. If that were the case, the first condition – that they be moderately intercorrelated – could not be met. Nevertheless, overt and covert unfavourable attitudes must have at least partially different social sources, otherwise they are not genuinely different. Fifth, overt and covert unfavourable attitudes are likely to have different consequences. They may have different effects on behavioural intentions. They may suggest different, yet complementary, explanations for support for ethnic discrimination, inclination to ethnic distance, and opposition to policies aimed at establishing ethnic equality. As we have argued previously, overt unfavourable attitudes do not provide a satisfactory explanation for these phenomena.

Considering these conditions, we have formulated the following research questions:

- What is the empirical structure of ethnocentrism? That is, are (a) overt and covert unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities related to each other, and (b) are overt and covert unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities related to favourable attitudes towards the majority population?
- To which social categories do members of the majority population who subscribe to overt and covert unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities belong?
- Which individual characteristics explain overt and covert unfavourable attitudes?

- To what extent do overt and covert unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities contribute to explanations of people's behavioural intentions regarding ethnic minorities?

## Conceptualising unfavourable attitudes

Given the state of affairs in research on this topic, we propose that profound explorations are necessary to conceptualise and operationalise unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities before we are able to submit these measurements to the statistical scrutiny of national sample data. The methodology has been based on elements of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1990) as elaborated by Wester (1991). We use both qualitative and quantitative research methods and we consider the perspectives of both majority members and ethnic minorities. Each of the two groups gives us selective insights into attitudes of the majority population towards ethnic minorities. We conducted in-depth interviews with 11 minority and 22 majority interviewees. The aim is a systematic conceptualisation by thorough inspection of aspects of social reality.<sup>2</sup> In a previous study the research methods and conceptualisation were described more elaborately (Verberk 1999). Here we only present the final results of these procedures.

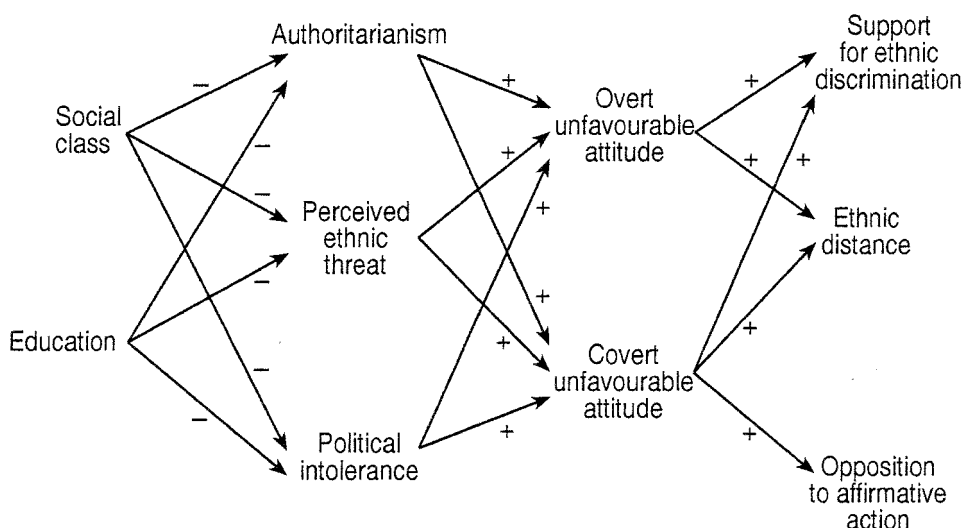
Our research illuminated different features of unfavourable attitudes.<sup>3</sup> The first is a *belief in the biological or cultural superiority of one's own group*. Members of the majority who express unfavourable attitudes believe that they are superior to ethnic minorities. The next feature can be termed *problematisation*. Individuals who express unfavourable attitudes regard the presence of ethnic minorities in Dutch society as problematic. They associate ethnic minorities with criminal behaviour, educational problems, deterioration of norms and values, housing shortages, economic decline, and other social problems. A third feature is *the generalisation of perceived negative characteristics of ethnic minorities* on the one hand, and simultaneously *the individualisation of perceived positive characteristics of ethnic minorities* on the other. We found that negative ideas of ethnic minorities were applied to the whole out-group without reservation; positively evaluated characteristics are considered as exceptions rather than as the rule. Furthermore, unfavourable attitudes can be expressed through *paternalism*. Paternalism occurs when members of the majority group are willing to provide members of ethnic minorities with whatever they think these minorities need. Yet they refuse to give them responsibility or freedom of choice. These apparently positive intentions are implicitly aimed at maintaining the dominance of the majority culture. Unfavourable attitudes are also expressed through the *exaggeration of cultural differences*. Members of the ethnic majority who hold unfavourable attitudes emphasise differences between their group and ethnic minorities. They do this in such a way that members of ethnic groups feel marginalised and excluded. In exaggerating the differences, members of the majority assume all members of their group share common cultural values, norms, and behaviours. The exaggeration of cultural differences can also take on the guise of *exoticism*. People belonging to the majority population often express their attraction to another culture by stressing that culture's colourful and unusual aspects. Nevertheless, the exaggerated manner in which they express this attraction makes it hard to believe them. We also found that majority people are on guard when interacting with ethnic minorities. We call this *negative cautiousness*. Members of ethnic

minorities perceive majority members as overly conscious of, and ill at ease in, their presence. Such members of the majority find it difficult to understand the customs and values of ethnic minorities and find acceptance of these customs even harder. Another way people express unfavourable attitudes is by *overvaluing the unimportant*. These people stress that the presence of ethnic minorities enriches Dutch society. However, they view this enrichment as limited to unimportant matters; they do not believe this enrichment pertains to more fundamental matters. Another feature of unfavourable attitudes is *neutralised feelings*. We found that some majority interviewees express no real positive or negative feelings towards ethnic minorities. They would not say 'I would like' or 'I would hate to have neighbours who belong to an ethnic minority group'. Instead, they would say 'I would not have any problems with that', or 'I would not feel uncomfortable'. It seems that they neutralise slightly negative or positive feelings after reflecting upon them. A last feature of unfavourable attitude is *negative tolerance*. This ostensible tolerance is expressed as indifference; which, however, lasts only as long as the majority member in question is not bothered by the minority member's actions. Furthermore, this negative tolerance often goes along with great attachment to traditional values of the majority in-group. Members of the majority are happy to give ethnic minorities the freedom to maintain their own way of life as long as they do not undermine traditional values. They display no positive tolerance of ethnic minorities.

The findings described above suggest, in sum, that unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities manifest themselves through *feelings of superiority, problematisation, generalisation of negative characteristics and the simultaneous individualisation of positive characteristics, paternalism, the exaggeration of cultural differences, exoticism, negative cautiousness, the overvaluation of the unimportant, neutralised feelings, and negative tolerance*. Having distinguished the features of unfavourable attitudes, we now examine their dimensional structure.

## Data collection, operationalisation and measurements

This study is part of a larger longitudinal project on 'Social and Cultural Trends in the Netherlands' (henceforth SOCON 1995; see Eisinga *et al.* 1999). Following a two-stage random sample technique, designed to represent the adult Dutch population, a representative sample of 1009 respondents was selected from the general population. Because the demographic sampling distribution closely matches the population distribution, we consider this sample representative of the entire Dutch population (Eisinga *et al.* 1999).<sup>4</sup> We operationalised our dependent variables, i.e. unfavourable attitudes, on the basis of our research review and qualitative data.<sup>5</sup> We did not develop a standardised measurement for *the exaggeration of cultural differences* and *exoticism* because we felt quantitative research methods were inadequate to measure these two features of unfavourable attitudes. Since the verbal and the non-verbal contexts are so important to the expression of exaggerated cultural differences and exoticism, we decided that standardised items would not be reliable and valid. After constructing the questionnaire, we tested it in a pilot study. Table 1 shows the adjusted measurement. The operationalisation of favourable attitudes towards the ethnic in-group, which was replicated from Eisinga and Scheepers (1989), is also presented in this table.



**Figure 1.** Empirical-theoretical model of the determinants and consequences of overt and covert unfavourable attitudes

The items dealing with these variables were factor-analysed simultaneously, providing a crucial test for the second criterion, i.e. items should be tested for factorial distinctiveness instead of constrained to load on a theoretically proposed factor-structure.<sup>6</sup> We examined the results of the principal factor analysis presented in Table 2. We used conventional criteria to evaluate the appropriateness of the factor model (Kim and Mueller 1984).<sup>7</sup>

As expected, principal factor analyses with oblique rotation revealed a three-dimensional structure. All items intended to measure favourable attitudes towards the ethnic majority only have a substantial loading on one dimension. Conversely, no other items loaded on this factor. Therefore this dimension is labelled a *favourable attitude towards the ethnic majority*.

Several items intended to measure unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities had to be eliminated because of low inter-item correlations, low communalities, factor loadings, or substantial double loadings. A second dimension consists of items intended to measure *feelings of superiority, problematisation, generalisation and individualisation, paternalism, and negative cautiousness*. This dimension predominantly concerns people's straightforward unfavourable beliefs. In the qualitative part of our study, we found these overt expressions of unfavourable attitudes among the interviewees who had less education and came from the lower social classes. We also found another dimension of unfavourable attitudes that consists of the *overvaluation of the unimportant, neutralised feelings, and negative tolerance*. When people disagree with the items that are part of the latter dimension, this indicates their denial of favourable characteristics on the part of ethnic minorities. This dimension can be distinguished from the former one by being implicitly unfavourable. We found these more covert expressions of unfavourable attitudes among those interviewees who have an intermediate or high level of education and who belong to higher social classes. So, the two dimensions are prevalent in different social categories.

Table 1. Final operationalisation of ethnocentrism

FAVOURABLE ATTITUDE TOWARDS ETHNIC MAJORITY	
v0657	We Dutch people are always willing to put our shoulder to the wheel
v0658	Generally speaking, the Netherlands is a better country than most other countries
v0663	Every Dutch person should pay honour to our national symbols, like the national flag and national anthem
v0665	I am proud to be Dutch
UNFAVOURABLE ATTITUDE TOWARDS ETHNIC MINORITIES	
<b>Feelings of superiority</b>	
v2100	In general, Dutch people behave better than ethnic minorities do
v2101	In general, the customs of Dutch people are better than those of ethnic minorities
v2102	Because they don't know any better, ethnic minorities cling to their own way of life
v2103	In general, ethnic minorities don't reach the level of achievement that Dutch people do
<b>Problematisation</b>	
v2104	People from ethnic minority groups do cause a lot of problems in our country
v2105	Our social problems would be solved to a large extent if all ethnic minorities were to return to their country of origin
<b>Generalisation of negative characteristics and individualisation of positive characteristics</b>	
v2106	There are only a few people from ethnic minority groups who really make an effort
v2107	There are many people from ethnic minority groups who make improper use of the Dutch social security system
v2108	There are only a few people from ethnic minority groups who really want to adjust to the Dutch way of life
v2109	There are many people from ethnic minority groups who are engaged in crime
<b>Paternalism</b>	
v2111	It is a good thing that we encourage ethnic minorities in their personal development
v2112	In order to be less discriminated against, ethnic minorities have to adjust to the Dutch way of life
v2113	In order to be able to develop themselves, ethnic minorities have to adjust to the Dutch way of life
v2114	It is important that we look after the interests of ethnic minorities
<b>The overvaluation of the unimportant</b>	
v2115	Dutch people can learn a lot of good things from ethnic minorities
v2116	Our country would be better off if we were willing to accept the good things from other cultures
v2117	The coming of ethnic minorities to the Netherlands is an enrichment to our cultural activities
<b>Neutralised feelings</b>	
v2118	How often have you felt sympathy for ethnic minorities living in the Netherlands?
v2119	How often have you felt admiration for ethnic minorities living in the Netherlands?
<b>Negative cautiousness</b>	
v2120	In initial contacts with ethnic minorities, you have to be extra on your guard
v2121	With ethnic minorities you often don't know where you stand
v2122	I find it hard to show understanding for customs of ethnic minorities
v2123	I feel uncomfortable when ethnic minorities are around
v2124	When I come into contact with ethnic minorities, I'm very careful what I say
v2125	When I come into contact with ethnic minorities, I try to approach ethnic minorities extra positively
<b>Negative tolerance</b>	
v2129	Out of consideration for other cultures, I am willing to adjust my own way of life
v2130	Living together with people from different cultures may not mean that I have to give up something

Notes: Answer categories: agree entirely; agree; do not agree, do not disagree; disagree; disagree entirely; never thought about that (except Neutralised feelings, v2118 and v2119, where the answer categories are: very often, often, not too often, just a few times, never).

Because of the distinction in explicit and implicit unfavourable attitudes, we label the two dimensions *overt and covert unfavourable attitude towards ethnic minorities* respectively.<sup>8</sup> As we hypothesised previously, overt as well as covert unfavourable attitudes are related to favourable attitudes towards the in-group, but this relationship is strongest with regard to overt unfavourable attitudes (0.50 and 0.24 respectively). In theoretical terms, this means that the mechanisms of social identification and social contra-identification are more strongly related in the case of overt unfavourable attitudes than in the case of covert ones.

## Hypotheses

We developed a theoretical model taking into account both previous theoretical contributions as well as insights derived from our systematic in-depth investigation. Following Davis (1985) we distinguish independent, intermediate, dependent, and consequent variables. Figure 1 visualises the map of hypotheses described in the following pages.

### *Hypotheses regarding the relationships between independent and dependent variables*

Our qualitative data suggest that overt and covert unfavourable attitudes are distributed in a particular manner among different social classes and educational categories. To relate these qualitative findings to broader theoretical concerns, we consider Ethnic Conflict theory to be rather fruitful. Central in Ethnic Conflict theory is the presumed (socio-economic) competition over scarce resources between social groups, such as between ethnic groups. Out-group hostility is proposed to arise from this competition. When members of the majority perceive that ethnic minorities accrue scarce resources, they may feel that the majority population can no longer claim these goods. Those considerations may affect whether people perceive ethnic minorities as posing a threat that, in turn, reinforces their unfavourable attitude towards them (Blalock 1967; Coser 1956; Levine and Campbell 1972).

We assume that people who belong to different social categories differ also in the extent to which they perceive ethnic minorities as a threat. People who have a relatively low rank in the system of social stratification may find themselves in social positions similar to those of ethnic minorities, who in the Netherlands are mainly concentrated among the lower ranks of the social system (Davegos *et al.* 1996). Hence, they are confronted on a daily basis with an actual and clearly-perceived competition over scarce resources. Consequently, they tend to express their unfavourable attitude towards ethnic minorities in relatively overt terms. By contrast, majority people who occupy a position somewhat higher in the social system (middle social classes or people with an intermediate level of education) may not actually experience this competition: however, they fear competition if ethnic minorities are upwardly mobile (Olzak 1992). Consequently, they tend to express their unfavourable attitude towards ethnic minorities in relatively covert terms. Therefore, we hypothesise that:

Overt unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities are most strongly prevalent among those members of the majority who

H1a have a low level of education

H1b belong to lower social classes.



Table 2. *Ethnocentrism: factor analyses*

Item	h <sup>2</sup>	Factor pattern ( > .20)		
		1	2	3
<b>Favourable attitude majority</b>				
	v0657	.26		.47
	v0658	.20		.38
	v0663	.37		.56
	v0665	.55		.77
<b>Unfavourable attitude minorities</b>				
superiority	v2100	.52	.68	
	v2101	.49	.65	
	v2102	.22	.41	
	v2103	.34	.56	
problematisation	v2104	.51	.66	
	v2105	.59	.59	.25
generalisation/ individualisation	v2106	.57	.67	
	v2107	.59	.62	.21
	v2108	.48	.52	
	v2109	.36	.57	
<b>Unfavourable attitude minorities</b>				
paternalism	v2111	.40	.52	
	v2112	.37	.44	.22
	v2113			
	v2114			
overvaluation unimportant	v2115	.42		.48
	v2116	.40		.57
	v2117	.50		.55
	v2118			
neutralised feelings	v2119	.26	.23	.37
	v2120	.43	.71	
negative cautiousness	v2121	.54	.75	
	v2122	.34	.56	
	v2123	.31	.59	
	v2124			
	v2125			
	v2129	.25		.52
negative tolerance	v2130			
<hr/>				
Determinant of correlation matrix	> .01			
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure	.94			
<hr/>				
Bartlett test of sphericity	5951			
Percentage of variance explained	.41			
N (after listwise deletion)	607			
<hr/>				
Factor correlation matrix				
	Factor 1	Factor 2		
Factor 2	.47			
Factor 3	.50	.24		

Source: SOCON (1995).

H1b belong to lower social classes.

Covert unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities are most strongly prevalent among those members of the majority who

H2a have a low or intermediate level of education

H2b belong to lower or middle social classes.

### *Hypotheses regarding the relationships between independent, intermediate and dependent variables*

We have tried to determine to what extent the bi-variate relationship between educational and class categories on the one hand and, on the other, overt and covert unfavourable attitudes was intermediated by other individual characteristics.

In line with Realistic Conflict theory (Blalock 1967; Coenders and Scheepers 1998; Coser 1956; Levine and Campbell 1972; Olzak 1989; Olzak and Nagel 1986), we propose that these relations might be intermediated by the degree to which members of the majority perceive ethnic minorities as a threat. The essential theoretical idea is that when members of the majority perceive ethnic minorities as a threat to their socio-economic interests, this reinforces processes of social contra-identification which, in turn, result in unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities. From this perspective, unfavourable attitudes have been considered as a rather rational response to perceptions of threat.

In addition to the perceived threat posed by ethnic minorities, we add another classic intermediate variable, namely *authoritarianism*. Adorno *et al.* (1950) posit that authoritarianism is highly predictive of ethnocentrism. The concept of authoritarianism was originally developed to advance the understanding of the relationship between social class and ethnocentrism. Fromm (1929) had found that the lower social classes were more likely to subscribe to aspects of Nazi ideology, especially to the unfavourable attitudes towards Jews and to anti-democratic policies. Following this line of research, Adorno *et al.* (1950) argued that because of their blind submission to authorities, authoritarian people are dependent on their social in-group to give them a favourable self-identity. In addition, authoritarian people condemn others who deviate from the conventional norms and values of the in-group. This means that authoritarian people are strongly inclined to identify with their in-group and contra-identify with out-groups. Scheepers *et al.* (1990) have integrated ideas of this classical study with the contemporary contributions of Social Identity theory (see also Coenders and Scheepers 1998). They have found that social class and education are associated with authoritarianism. Less educated people and people belonging to the lower social classes are more likely than better educated people and people belonging to the higher social classes to display an authoritarian attitude.

The third intermediate variable that we assume to mediate the relationship between social class and education on the one hand, and unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities on the other, is *political intolerance*. Empirical research has often found that members of the lower social strata are more politically intolerant than members of the higher social strata (Davis 1985; Jelen and Wilcox 1990; Lipset 1983; Selznick and Steinberg 1969). This research shows that differences in educational attainment are particularly important

in explaining differences in political intolerance. The educational effects can be attributed to socialisation within a certain social-cultural context (Selznick and Steinberg 1969) and to differences of perspective (Konig 1997). First, the effect of education can be seen as representing the influence of the dominant liberal culture. Second, members of the lower social strata can be seen as possessing a more narrow perspective on social reality than members of the higher social strata, which, in turn, makes them more politically intolerant. Subsequently, researchers have assumed that political intolerance influences the process by which people evaluate other groups such as ethnic minorities (Lipset 1983; Wagner and Zick 1995). Politically intolerant people are assumed to be most likely to dislike ethnic minorities.

Based on the above-mentioned theories and findings, we hypothesise that:

Less-educated members of the majority and those belonging to lower social classes are more likely than better-educated members of the majority and those belonging to higher social classes to

- H3a perceive ethnic minorities as a threat
- H3b subscribe authoritarian attitudes
- H3c be politically intolerant

The more members of the majority

- H4a feel threatened by ethnic minorities
- H4b display an authoritarian attitude
- H4c are politically tolerant

the more they tend to display overt and covert unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities.

### *Hypotheses regarding the relationships between dependent and consequent variables*

Previous research has found that overt unfavourable attitudes are important in explaining how people intend to behave towards ethnic minorities (Scheepers 1996; Schmidt 1992). The Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen 1993; Ajzen and Fishbein 1991; Fishbein and Ajzen 1975) postulates that, while situational, normative and individual characteristics also have effects, attitudes are the major determinants of behavioural intentions. Behavioural intentions, in turn, guide and affect actual behaviour. Meta-analyses have provided considerable support for the Planned Behaviour model (Eckes and Six 1994; Schmidt 1992). We suppose that not only overt but also covert unfavourable attitudes are important determinants of behavioural intentions towards ethnic minorities.<sup>9</sup> We hypothesise that:

The more members of the majority display overt and covert unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities, the more likely are they

- H5a to oppose affirmative action policies
- H5b to support ethnic distance
- H5c to support ethnic discrimination.

On the understanding that:

- H6 overt unfavourable attitudes tend to have stronger effects than covert unfavourable attitudes.

## Analyses and results

The measurements of the independent, intermediate and consequent variables were derived from their valid use in previous research.<sup>10</sup> The measurement of these variables has been documented in detail previously (Verberk 1999). What is important here is whether the items that indicate overt and covert unfavourable attitudes, and the items that indicate a perceived threat, are empirically distinguishable. To answer this question we conducted simultaneous principal factor analyses without any constraints. All but one of the items have a substantial loading, particularly on the factor they are assumed to measure. Only one item (v2105), which was intended to measure overt unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities, appears to be more related to the threat people perceive from ethnic minorities. To avoid an entanglement of concepts, we excluded this item from further analyses. We conducted new factor analyses on the remaining items (see Table 3). The results indicate that all items actually top the dimension they were proposed to measure, and no other dimensions. This actually implies that perceived threat can be factorially distinguished from overt as well as covert unfavourable attitudes, instead of being embedded in blatant unfavourable attitudes, as proposed by Pettigrew and Meertens (1995). Further evidence for this finding is provided in Scheepers *et al.* (2002) for 15 European countries.

To test the hypotheses on the social location of ethnic attitudes, we calculated percentages of respondents who have a value higher than the mid-value of these scales. The overt and covert indexes were created by summing them up. We used the T-test procedure of SPSS to examine whether the differences between the different social categories are statistically significant.

Table 3 shows the results of the analyses with regard to education. In the lower part of the table it can be seen that agreement with covert unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities is much more widely dispersed among the population than agreement with overt unfavourable attitudes. This conforms to our expectations. It appears that 48.2 per cent of the respondents have a score higher than the mid-value of the covert unfavourable attitude scale. This percentage is considerably higher than the percentage of respondents who agree with overt unfavourable attitudes (35.7 per cent). Table 4 also shows the differences in agreement between people who belong to different educational categories. Agreement with overt and covert unfavourable attitudes is most likely among the less educated. About 60 per cent of those who have completed elementary or lower vocational school agree with overt and covert unfavourable attitudes. The better-educated part of the population is relatively unlikely to agree with unfavourable attitudes. These findings have been ascertained time and again, and they confirm *hypotheses 1a and 2a*. Particularly striking are the results for people whose highest educational level is intermediate secondary school. A relatively low percentage of these people agree with overt unfavourable attitudes (20.0 per cent). However, more than twice that percentage of people of that education standard agree with covert unfavourable attitudes (47.3 per cent). Also remarkable are the findings regarding people who have finished secondary vocational school. Among this group, 35.3 per cent express overt unfavourable attitudes while 61.2 per cent express covert unfavourable attitudes. By means of T-tests, we found that the observed differences in mean score between educational categories cannot be attributed to chance but are really different.

**Table 3.** *Overt and covert unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities, perception of ethnic threat, and favourable attitudes towards the majority group: factor analyses*

Item		h <sup>2</sup>	Factor pattern (> .20)			
			1	2	3	4
Overt unfavourable attitude ethnic minorities	v2100	.52				.55
	v2101	.48				.53
	v2102	.21				.35
	v2103	.34				.55
	v2104	.53			.21	.62
	v2106	.56				.50
	v2107	.60	.32			.37
	v2108	.49			.21	.38
	v2109	.36				.43
	v2112	.44			.24	.54
	v2113	.41			.28	.46
	v2120	.44				.63
	v2121	.56				.67
	v2122	.34				.40
	v2123	.32				.43
Covert unfavourable attitude ethnic minorities	v2115	.43			.48	
	v2116	.42			.56	
	v2117	.50			.52	
	v2119	.27			.39	.24
	v2129	.25			.51	
Perception of ethnic threat	v0639	.40	.55			
	v0640	.33	.40			.21
	v0642	.48	.71			
	v0643	.55	.66			
	v2150	.62	.76			
	v2152	.60	.63			
	v2154	.72	.82			
	v2155	.75	.90			
	v2156	.64				
Unfavourable attitude ethnic majority	v0657	.26		.46		
	v0658	.20		.41		
	v0663	.37		.56		
	v0665	.53		.73		
Determinant of correlation matrix		< .01				
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure		.96				
Bartlett test of sphericity		9176				
Percentage of variance explained		.46				
N (after listwise deletion)		611				
Factor correlation matrix						
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3			
Factor 2	.44					
Factor 3	.49	.24				
Factor 4	.74	.45	.42			

Source: SOCON (1995).

**Table 4.** *Overt and covert unfavourable attitudes by education*

	Percentage agreement overt unfavourable attitude	Percentage agreement covert unfavourable attitude	Mean score overt unfavourable attitude (range 1–5)	Mean score covert unfavourable attitude (range 1–5)
Elementary school	59.3	64.3	3.20	3.31
Lower vocational school	60.1	63.1	3.20	3.32
Lower secondary school	36.3	52.5	2.91	3.17
Secondary vocational school	35.3	61.2	2.84	3.20
Intermediate secondary school	20.0	47.3	2.63	3.04
Higher secondary school	22.1	31.2	2.63	2.78
College	18.7	29.5	2.62	2.85
University	20.3	23.8	2.62	2.76
Total	35.7	48.2	2.85	3.08
N	833	827	833	827
Cramer's V	.26*	.23*		
F			22.04*	14.98*

Source: SOCON (1995).

Next, we turn to differences between people who belong to different social classes.<sup>11</sup> Table 5 shows a wide level of variance between the attitudes expressed by individuals from different socio-occupational backgrounds. A number of deviations from the general mean are worth mentioning. As has been established

**Table 5.** *Overt and covert unfavourable attitudes by social class*

	Percentage agreement overt unfavourable attitude	Percentage agreement covert unfavourable attitude	Mean score overt unfavourable attitude (range 1–5)	Mean score covert unfavourable attitude (range 1–5)
Professionals	23.5	36.8	2.65	2.89
Routine non-manual	26.3	49.1	2.75	3.09
Small proprietors	42.3	61.5	3.02	3.22
Technicians, supervisor manual work	34.8	52.2	2.77	3.11
Manual workers	47.3	46.2	3.02	3.04
Retired persons	32.7	44.9	2.79	3.08
Unemployed persons	53.5	66.1	3.12	3.34
Housekeepers	28.6	38.8	2.72	2.92
Full-time students				
Total	35.7	48.2	2.85	3.08
N	833	827	833	827
Cramer's V	19*	17*		
F			10.18*	5.56*

Source: SOCON (1995).

many times before, skilled and unskilled manual workers, and small proprietors are more likely than the rest of the population to express overt unfavourable attitudes; we find these attitudes also among retired people and those engaged in housekeeping. The above categories are also more likely to express covert unfavourable attitudes than the general population is. There is one particularly interesting category, namely the routine non-manual employees, who are generally considered middle-class. The percentage of routine non-manual workers who agree with overt unfavourable attitudes is relatively low (26.3 per cent); by contrast, agreement with covert unfavourable attitudes is almost twice as high (49.1 per cent). The differences between the classes in terms of the mean scores on the overt and covert scale follow a similar pattern to the percentages of agreement.

The T-tests show that the mean score of the lowest social class (manual workers) on the overt unfavourable attitude scale differs significantly from the mean scores of professionals, routine non-manual workers, technicians, and supervisors of manual work. This finding lends some partial support to *hypothesis 1b*. However, this hypothesis is not completely confirmed by the findings. We did not find a significant difference in mean score on overt unfavourable attitudes between small proprietors and manual workers. The former category is considered to be middle and the latter to be lower class, at least in the Netherlands. Therefore, *hypothesis 1b* is also partially rejected. The mean score of the highest social class (professionals) on the covert scale differs significantly from the mean scores of the middle and lower social classes. These results lead us to accept *hypothesis 2b*.

We used LISREL VIII analyses to consider whether or not to reject the hypotheses about the intermediate effects of the perception of threat, authoritarianism and political intolerance.<sup>12</sup> Table 6 shows the LISREL standardised parameter estimates after estimating the restricted final model. The fit indices of the restricted model indicate that this model accurately fits the data. These results are visualised in Figure 2.

A cursory examination of Table 6 becomes a test of the remaining hypotheses. The educational level of the respondent does indeed have a significant effect on the perception of threat, authoritarianism and political intolerance. The standardised parameters of the various different educational categories must be interpreted in relation to the reference category, namely people with a university education. All the parameter estimates of the educational categories are positive. This indicates that the reference category – people who have a university education – is least likely to perceive ethnic minorities as a threat, to subscribe to authoritarianism, or to be politically intolerant. Table 6 shows that people with a low level of education (up to the completion of secondary vocational school) are particularly likely to perceive ethnic minorities as threatening. It turns out that all people who do not have a university degree are more likely to embrace an authoritarian attitude than those with a university degree. Finally, people who have completed lower vocational school and those with a lower level of education are more politically intolerant than people who have a university degree.

Table 6 shows that the effects of education on the perception of ethnic threat, authoritarianism and political intolerance are much stronger than the effects of social class on these intermediate variables. The class effects are small; nearly all parameter estimates are non-significant. Nevertheless, we do not exclude these

**Table 6.** Standardised parameter estimates of the structural equation model of the determinants, causes, and consequences of overt and covert unfavourable attitudes controlled for gender, age, religious denomination, region, and degree of urbanisation of place of residence

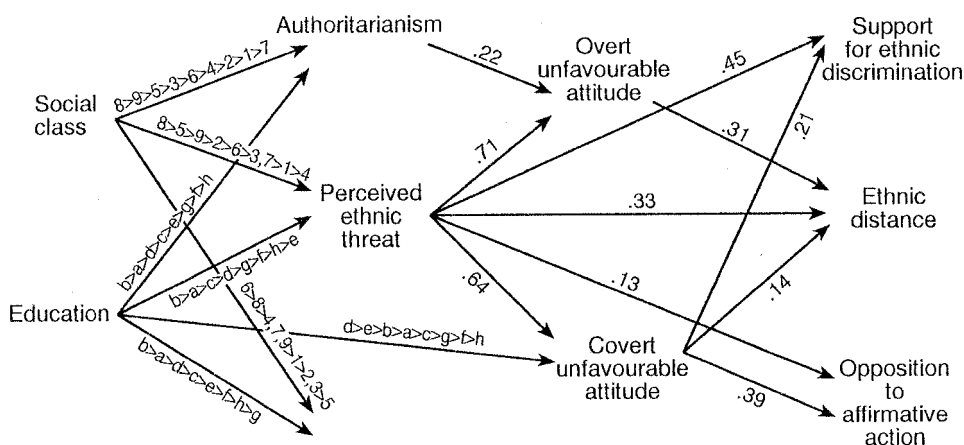
Independent variables	Dependent variables							
	Perceived threat	Authoritarianism	Political intolerance	Overt unfavourable attitude	Covert unfavourable attitude	Support ethnic discrimination	Oppose affirmative action	Ethnic distance
Education								
Elementary school	.31(6.85)*	.43(3.89)*	.19(.76)*		.13(1.21)*			
Lower vocational school	.33(6.02)*	.44(3.21)*	.20(.63)*		.15(1.12)*			
Lower secondary school	.18(3.58)*	.28(2.35)*	.09(.34)		.12(1.02)*			
Secondary vocational school	.17(2.82)*	.29(2.03)*	.10(.31)		.22(1.53)*			
Intermediate secondary school	-.00( -.07)	.17(1.85)*	.02(.08)		.17(1.44)*			
Higher secondary school	.01( -.17)	.08(.81)	.00(.00)		.08(.14)			
College	.02(.35)	.10(.67)	-.04( -.11)		.10(.55)			
University <sup>o</sup>								
Social class								
Professionals <sup>o</sup>								
Routine non-manual workers	.05(1.04)	.00(.03)	-.01( -.03)					
Small proprietors	.02(.79)	.05(.74)	-.01( -.03)					
Technicians, supervisor of manual workers	-.00( -.06)	.02(.38)	.05(.36)					
Manual workers	.11(2.09)*	.07(.54)	-.04( -.13)					
Retired persons	.04(.77)	.04(.31)	.19(.71)					
Unemployed persons	.02(.44)	-.04( -.46)	.05(.24)					
Housekeepers	.20(3.66)*	.14(1.01)*	.11(.34)					
Full-time students	.06(1.64)	.08(.88)	.05(.25)					
Perceived threat				.71*	.64*	.45*	.13*	.33*
Authoritarianism				.22*				
Political intolerance								



Table 6. Continued

Independent variables	Dependent variables						
	Perceived threat	Authoritarianism	Political intolerance	Overt unfavourable attitude	Covert unfavourable attitude	Support ethnic discrimination	Oppose affirmative action
Overt unfavourable attitude							.31*
Covert unfavourable attitude						.21*	.39*
							.14*
R <sup>2</sup>	.27	.42	.20	.81	.51	.40	.26
Chi <sup>2</sup> = 99.74 (df = 79, p = .06), AGFI = .95, RMSEA = .02, N = 790							.59

Notes: \* = statistically significant p < .05; ° = reference category; unstandardised parameters in brackets.  
Source: SOCON (1995).



**Figure 2.** Structural equation model of the determinants and consequences of overt and covert unfavourable attitudes controlled for gender, age, religious denomination, region, and degree of urbanisation of place of residence  
( $\chi^2 = 99.74$ ,  $df = 79$ ,  $p = .06$ , AGFI = .95, RMSEA = .02,  $N = 790$  Source: SOCON 1995)

parameters from the model because fixing these effects to zero significantly decreases the fit of the model. These results partly confirm *hypotheses 3a, 3b and 3c*. So, less-educated members perceive ethnic minorities as more of a threat, are more inclined to embrace authoritarianism, and are more politically intolerant than better-educated members of the Dutch majority society.

Moreover, it is important to note that perceived threat appears to have strong effects on both dependent variables. The effect of perceived threat on overt unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities is particularly strong: the standardised parameter estimate amounts to 0.71. The effect of perceived threat on covert unfavourable attitudes is also worth mentioning: it is 0.64. The effects of political intolerance on overt and covert unfavourable attitudes are so small that they are statistically insignificant. The effect of authoritarianism on overt unfavourable attitudes is modest (0.22), whereas its effect on covert unfavourable attitudes is non-significant.

The effects of the intermediate variables on the dependent variables are strong enough to negate nearly all the direct effects of education and social class. This indicates that perception of threat and authoritarianism may interpret the original relationship between independent variables such as social class and education, on the one hand, and dependent variables, namely overt and covert unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities, on the other. Nonetheless, education still has some significant direct effects on covert unfavourable attitudes, effects not accounted for by perception of threat, authoritarianism and political intolerance.

These results lead us to accept *hypothesis 4a* regarding the relationship between perception of threat on the one hand, and overt and covert unfavourable attitudes on the other. *Hypothesis 4b* must partially be rejected since it turns out

that authoritarianism has no effect on covert unfavourable attitudes. We reject *hypothesis 4c* because the effects of political intolerance on both overt and covert unfavourable attitudes are statistically insignificant.

Now, finally, let us turn to the hypotheses regarding the relationship between the dependent variables and the consequent variables. The results of the LISREL analyses show that opposition to affirmative action is significantly affected by covert unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities. The parameter estimate is 0.39. Contrary to our hypotheses, overt unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities have no significant effect on opposition to affirmative action. This means that *hypothesis 5a* can only be partially accepted.

The far-left column of Table 6 shows that support for ethnic distance is affected by both overt and covert unfavourable attitudes. The parameter estimates are 0.31 and 0.14 respectively. This means that *hypothesis 5b* is not refuted.

Table 6 also shows that support for ethnic discrimination is significantly affected by covert unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities. The parameter estimate amounts to 0.21. Nevertheless, *hypothesis 5c* must partially be refuted because the effect of overt unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities on support for ethnic discrimination is not significant.

Are overt or are covert unfavourable attitudes more important in explaining the consequent variables? Overt unfavourable attitudes indeed have stronger effects than covert unfavourable attitudes on ethnic distance. However, overt unfavourable attitudes have no significant effect on ethnic discrimination or opposition to affirmative action. Therefore they are absent in the restricted model. Covert unfavourable attitudes, however, have significant effects on both consequent variables. This means that the *hypothesis 6* is partially refuted.

Contrary to our expectation, education affects covert unfavourable attitudes not only indirectly but also directly. The parameter estimates are positive. This means that after controlling for other variables in the model, university graduates are less likely to express covert unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities than people with any other level of education. The parameter estimate for those who completed secondary vocational school is particularly high (0.19). Another remarkable finding is that the perception of ethnic threat contributes significantly to the explanation of all consequent variables. The effect of perceived threat on intended discriminatory behaviour is especially strong; the parameter estimate amounts to 0.45. The effect parameters of perceived ethnic threat on opposition to affirmative action and on support for ethnic distance are 0.13 and 0.33 respectively.

## Conclusions

In this paper we set out to investigate the structure, determinants and consequences of overt and covert unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities. Rather than concentrating on one research method – a rather common practice in sociology today – we have used both qualitative and quantitative methods to approach attitudes towards ethnic minorities. This methodological triangulation has proven both a fruitful and a necessary approach to the study of attitudes towards ethnic minorities. We now evaluate our results in light of the previously defined conditions.

*The uni- versus multi-dimensionality of unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities*

Overt and covert unfavourable attitudes are factorially distinguishable. We found two empirically distinct dimensions based on evidence derived from an actual test with principal factor analysis without any constraints on the measures. One refers to straightforward overt unfavourable beliefs about ethnic minorities. The other refers to the absence of favourable beliefs about ethnic minorities. The high correlation between the two scales (0.47) indicates that even though they are factorially distinct, they have a lot in common.

*The empirical structure of ethnocentrism*

Overt and covert unfavourable attitudes are related to favourable attitudes towards the in-group, but this relationship is strongest with regard to overt unfavourable attitudes. We conclude that ethnocentrism is more than the combination of overt unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities and favourable attitudes towards the ethnic in-group. The outcome of the process of social contra-identification can be overt *or* covert unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities.

*The social location of attitudes towards ethnic minorities*

Less-educated people and those who belong to the lower social classes are particularly likely to express overt unfavourable attitudes. People who belong to those social categories also express strong covert unfavourable attitudes. Furthermore, we concluded that majority members with an intermediate level of education and those who belong to the middle social classes also express covert unfavourable attitudes. This conclusion is noteworthy since the latter categories do not express strong overt unfavourable attitudes. Moreover, previous research has not shown them to be unfavourably inclined towards ethnic minorities. Using the terminology of Social Identity theory, these findings mean that these intermediate categories are also likely to engage in processes of social contra-identification. However, they apparently use more covert terms to express their attitude; they deny that ethnic minorities have favourable characteristics rather than attributing unfavourable characteristics to them. Thus, our study contributes to an understanding of the social location of unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities. The empirical evidence of our study leads us to conclude that the distinction between overt and covert unfavourable attitudes is not just useful but essential (cf. Pettigrew and Meertens 2001). When one concentrates only on overt unfavourable attitudes, this results in a biased description of the social location of unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities.

*The determinants of unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities*

This study has shown that overt and covert unfavourable attitudes have partly different sources. We concluded that perception of threat is particularly import-

ant in explaining overt and covert unfavourable attitudes. Furthermore, authoritarianism explains overt unfavourable attitudes.

It turned out that perceived ethnic threat and authoritarianism explained most of the effects of education and social class on both aspects of unfavourable attitudes. We still found that education has a direct effect on the covert dimension. This is noteworthy because both the Authoritarianism theory and Ethnic Conflict theory place a greater emphasis on the role of social class than they do on the role of education.

### *The consequences of unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities*

We found that overt and covert unfavourable attitudes do differ in their consequences. We showed that the stronger people's unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities are, the more they are inclined to maintain ethnic distance. Moreover, the stronger people's covert unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities are, the more they are inclined to maintain ethnic distance, support ethnic discrimination, and oppose policies aimed at establishing ethnic equality. Although our findings meet the last condition, they partly contradict our hypotheses. After all, we hypothesised that overt unfavourable attitudes would have stronger effects than covert ones on the various consequent variables. Another important finding of our study is that the perception of ethnic threat has strong effects on behavioural intentions. Unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities only partly mediate these effects.

### *Summing up*

The findings of our research constitute progress in our understanding of contemporary unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities, with particular reference to the Dutch case. Questions remain about the important effects of education and perceived ethnic threat. Also the finding that covert unfavourable attitudes have stronger effects on some behavioural intentions than the overt ones needs further examination. Looking back, we can conclude that we have learned more about the nature, social location, determinants and consequences of contemporary unfavourable attitudes in Dutch society. We conclude that the distinction between overt and covert unfavourable attitudes is extremely important in order to reveal the sources and dynamics of the different forms of unfavourable attitudes towards ethnic minorities. This enables us to attain a better understanding of the persistence of ethnic inequality in Dutch society.

### **Notes**

- 1 Recently, however, some exceptions have been found and Turner (1999) has argued that this relationship has been considered only under certain conditions. However, because the theory has been consistently confirmed empirically in large-scale surveys, we consider it appropriate to use in this case.
- 2 This first (qualitative) part of our research aimed to conceptualise and operationalise the attitudes of members of the ethnic majority towards ethnic minorities. We have used a preliminary conceptual framework that emerged from our review of the literature (Strauss and Corbin 1990). We did not limit ourselves to hypotheses based on this review. Rather, we have used our review

of the literature to heighten our theoretical sensitivity with regard to the attitudes of members of the majority towards ethnic minorities. The review has therefore a sensitising function: it tells us which factors may be relevant, what we might expect to find and, most importantly, which questions need further exploration in the qualitative research.

- 3 It should be noted that not all of the features of unfavourable attitudes that we distinguish are new to the field. There is some overlap with others already defined or discussed elsewhere.
- 4 Previous analyses of missing data (Konig 1997) have shown no evidence of selective non-response (neither on the level of respondents, nor on the level of items).
- 5 For this purpose, we proceeded as follows. First, we examined whether the features had been operationalised in previous research. In that case, we chose the items that had been proven to be reliable and valid in previous investigations. Second, in case there were no pre-tested items available, we formulated new items that were derived from the interview data. Each central feature, which was discovered in the preceding stages, entails a list of characteristics that formed the basis for the survey items we formulated. We selected from these items to construct a standardised battery that would enable us to measure people's attitudes towards ethnic minorities. This strategy provided us with a pool of 57 separate items with which to measure the different features of blatant and subtle unfavourable attitudes. After consulting with experts in the field, we reduced this extensive list to 27 items, ten of which were intended to measure blatant unfavourable attitudes and seventeen of which were intended to measure subtle unfavourable attitudes. Each item associates the ethnic out-group with an attribute that is part of the feature which we are trying to measure (see Fishbein and Ajzen 1975).
- 6 The answers to all items followed a continuum ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Before conducting factor analyses on the items, we recoded them to match their interpretation. This means that, with the exception of items v2115, v2116, v2117, v2118, v2119 and v2129, all items were recoded.
- 7 We examined the correlation matrix, Bartlett's test of sphericity, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of sampling adequacy, Kaiser's eigenvalues (minimum value 1.0), the discontinuity in the eigenvalue plot (scree test), the factor loadings (minimum value 0.40), the communalities (minimum value 0.20), and the interpretability of the model.
- 8 The reliability coefficients of these two measures suggest a high or at least reasonable degree of internal consistency between the items that belong to one dimension. Cronbach's alphas of the dimensions overt and covert unfavourable attitudes are 0.92, and 0.73 respectively.
- 9 We focus on intentional rather than actual behaviour. A first reason for this is that no valid and reliable standardised measures are available to assess actual behaviour through social surveys. These surveys can only measure reported or intended behaviour. Second, if we were to try to focus on both actual and reported behaviour, this would yield a variety of non-comparable data. After all, only few members of the majority can report on actual behaviour since ethnic minorities are concentrated in certain parts of the country. Also, not everyone is in a position to discriminate against minorities: for instance, one must be a personnel manager to be able to reject minority applicants.
- 10 We distinguished three consequent variables: *ethnic distance*, *support for ethnic discrimination*, and *opposition to affirmative action policies*. We derived the measurements of these variables mainly from previous research. The items intended to measure *ethnic distance* are based on the Bogardus measurement (1968), which gauges people's intention to maintain distance between themselves and ethnic minorities in different domains of social life. Second, we operationalised *support for ethnic discrimination* on the basis of the 'Cultural Changes in the Netherlands' research project. The items that assess support for ethnic discrimination refer to imaginary daily situations in which Dutch people are compared to members of ethnic minorities. Respondents are asked whether Dutch people or minorities should receive preferential treatment with regard to lay-offs, promotions and housing. The third consequent variable, *opposition towards affirmative action policies*, is measured by items that assess the extent to which respondents objected to affirmative action in jobs and in education (see also Sniderman and Carmines 1997). The 'Dutch Election Study' (Statistics Netherlands 1994) has used similar items previously.
- 11 We consider professionals to be the highest social class. We consider routine non-manual workers, small proprietors, technicians, and supervisors of manual workers to be middle class. Manual workers themselves are considered to be lower social class.
- 12 We control the direct and indirect relationships between the variables for the additional effects of gender, age, religious denomination, region and degree of urbanisation of place of residence (see Konig 1997).

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